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STATEN ISLAND

ONE VAST CITY

ONE MILLION INHABITANTS

ONE HOUR TO NEW YORK

A DREAM

WITH HIS EYES FULL-OPENED

BY

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TOTTENVILLE

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STATEN ISLAND

1 VAST CITY
MILLION INHABITANTS
HOUR TO NEW YORK

I

Emerging in the neighborhood of the Atlantic basin like a natural dock—the first land descried by the spy-glass of the mariner as he rides into the Bay and the last to be discerned as he sails ocean-bound through the Narrows—STATEN ISLAND, more by its advantages of position than by any thrilling incident to signalize its career, has been consociated with the early discoveries of the American continent.

The Northmen—in their progressive explorations from the Danish peninsula to Iceland, from the Icelandic ports to the snowy wastes of Greenland, from the Greenlandish establishments to Labrador, and thence, along the coasts of New England, to more sunny latitudes—may have cast anchor near our hospitable shores, indulged in a clam chowder, or swallowed dozens of raw oysters on the shell. Who knows?

It is positively asserted that Verrazzani, navigating under the lily-white flag of France, entered our harbor and looked smilingly upon the wood-crowned heights of the Island.

Before risking his vessel further than the entrance of the Bay, Henry Hudson decided to visit in a boat the fragrant home of the Aquehongas, and oared his venturous course through the sinuosities of the Staten Island Sound.

Out of the Staten Eylandt forests, the industrious colonists of the Netherlands, the ardent champions of protestantism in France, and the ambitious English, chipped their bouweries, plantations or farms.

Since that time, this living concrete of all the nations of the earth, called the American citizen, whose favorite rendez-vous is the city of New York, has planted his tents over every part of our Insular Domain.

II

The commerce of the world gorges New York with merchandize and wealth. Industry dins his workshops. Immigration gluts his tenements. Under this triple impulsion, the Metropolis has leaped from the Battery to the High Bridge. Every warehouse built, every bank erected, every shop established, are surely taking the place of a residence, and driving the people outside the precincts of Manhattan island. How much of these riches, what quantity of those products, what number of the trade-evicted New Yorkers; may we ask, ever cross to this Island?

The shape of Staten Island might be compared to that of a tortoise. You see its neck popping out of its case at Richmond Valley and its head sipping in the waters of

Tottenville. The fiery march of the Metropolis has not succeeded in accelerating its habitual pace. Every thing wears a placid turn in our midst. Every body looks unconcerned.

“Away with the hurry, and tumult, and follies of the wicked city ! Let us sleep our nights in undisturbed quiet and live our days in profound peace ! Our ancestors knew what they were about : we follow their worthy example.” Such is the language too frequently heard from the mouths of those Inhabitants who would more largely benefit by the progress of the place.

In a geographical sense, Staten Island belongs to New Jersey, whilst her political ties attach her to New York. Like a cut-off limb, she seems deprived of the exuberant vitality imparted to either of her relatives.

The difficulties of interior and exterior communications—the absence of extensive manufacturing establishments—the reputed insalubrity of the climate—whatever may be the true reason, the lamentable fact can not be disproved that, in comparison with its neighbors, Staten Island has remained stationary.

It is high time the Islanders should shake off their traditional lethargy, so turtle-like, for the sake of their private interests as much as of public policy. At any rate—be it by slow and steady advances, by spasmodic and rapid strides, against our vehement protest or with our gracious consent—this Island is bound to grow to her adult size. We had better go forward of our own motion, methinks, than to be dragged along by new-comers.

III

The federal government, the state, the town, the village, exercise in turn a certain authority over us.

Divided and subdivided, the towns aspire to be elevated to the dignity of villages.

Growing side by side, those villages will, before a long period elapses, overspread the whole Island. Annoyed by incessant conflicts of jurisdiction, taking into consideration the economies of government on a large scale, yielding to the promises of general efficiency resulting from unity of municipal organization, the Inhabitants shall vote down their villagery as a cumbersome piece of machinery, and proceed to legislate the union of these separate portions of the County. The combined corporations will be christened

The City of Staten Island.

IV

Staten Island comprehends a much greater extent of habitable ground than her big brother of the isle of Manhattan. On account both of its vicinity and configuration, it is especially calculated to afford a débouché to the overflowing population of the Imperial City. There might circulate, with ample elbow-room, in our water-bound City, the modest aggregation of

One Million Inhabitants.

V

For the purposes of congressional and state-senatorial representation, the Island forms part of a district only. It is also comprised in the Health, Excise, and Police Metropolitan districts.

The jurisdiction of Richmond County, inclusive of the whole Island, offers the prototype of the fuller powers of the incorporated City.

The charter of STATEN ISLAND CITY should be framed with a view to constitute a concentrated, responsible, and consistent form of municipal government. Among its organic articles, this charter should contain one establishing Departments of General Education and of Public Works, respectively charged with promoting the welfare of the coarser body and of its subtler host.

The periodical contests over the election of the City officers and, consequentially, discussions—intermingled, no doubt, with angry debates—about local and party questions, could not fail to arouse the apathy of the least public-spirited citizens of the new community.

VI

Those timorous persons who admire nothing but the past, and who already regard with fearful suspicions the small organizations that are instinctively crystallizing to-day, may dread this idea of a greater administrative area. They will oppose this consolidation on the ground, in the first place, that it may be next to impossible to manage properly an establishment of such huge proportions, and, sec

ondly, because the administration of a populous and rich commonwealth is sure to open an artesian well of corrupting influences and jobbing practices, which the municipal borers will exploit until they reach hard pan.

But space and time being reduced to the minimum ratio have proportionately augmented the possibilities of administering, without inconvenience, cities and states embracing treble and quadruple the dimensions of the cities and states of olden times. That is incontestible.

On the other hand, we must renounce altogether our cherished notion of republican government, if we are already constrained to assume, that personal integrity has taken an eternal flight from our land. Repressive laws may have the power to prevent vices from breaking out like epidemic diseases in the midst of society, but they do not produce virtue—a rare plant, it is the special sphere of our educators of the school, in the pulpit, from the press, around the domestic hearth, to cultivate it ever and every where.

V I I

Certain folks pretend that ignorance is bliss. Believe it not: it is moral misery and intellectual blindness. The school-teacher who shows the young idea how to shoot is fulfilling a better employment of social forces than the policeman who clubs it down.

Every man and woman, every boy and girl, should know how to read and write.

The results of wide-spread ignorance have been ascertained, let us try for once those of a truly universal education. Nothing short of a full test can decide the relative superiority of advantages offered to the masses by the two irrepressible antagonists, Ignorance and Knowledge.

V I I I

One of the points of the most urgent importance to be pressed upon the attention of the Council of Staten Island City will be to direct their Department of Public Works, assisted by a committee of citizens of refined taste and ripe experience, to devise a unitary plan of roads serving the double object of facilitating the in-land and out-land commerce of the City.

I X

One hour should be the limit of time spent in communicating between all the parts of Staten Island.

The present facilities for journeying through the different parts of the Island must be considered still very imperfect. They are impeded by the want of a regular system of road inter-communications. In effect, where a broad street should display its stately course, you wander through a tortuous lane. You are entrapped in an impassable cul-de-sac whilst you should enter a wide avenue. Here a road might be opened for the convenience of man and beast: you butt your patience against an interminable fence, causing long detours and presenting an effectual barrier to social or business intercourse.

X

The remotest part of Staten Island should be within one hour of New York.

In the matter of daily change of places, time is more than money : it is comfort rendered possible, travelling made pleasant, home brought next door to the shop, office, or store.

The great desideratum of every person employed in New York is to be capable of effecting the passage from his and her home inside of an hour. The affectionate head of a family estimates a quick return at night as the indispensable condition of living out of the city.

Admit at once that New York is, for all its Environs, the inexhaustible reservoir from which must be drawn a fast increase of their population.

Every habitable point around the Metropolis, that can be attained within one hour from the City Hall, is seized with speculative avidity. The epoch of a complete filling up of dwelling-space possessing this one-hour-travelling condition is close at hand. Then, must inevitably come the turn of Staten Island, so long neglected, provided she prepares herself for the emergency by breaking down every obstacle that uselessly prolongs the time now spent in passing from point to point.

Let the railroad and ferry companies show an intelligent regard for their own dividends, added to a tender pity for the requests of their patrons, by multiplying and shortening the means of communication : they will thereby create a demand for habitations, for the toiling thousands, which the enterprise of the place will find practical difficulty in

supplying. How is it possible to compete on equal terms with our more fortunate neighbors as long as our boards of directors stick to the time-honored policy of strict exclusion of the not-native, not-wealthy element, pursued by the companies that used to control the transit from Staten Island to New York? It is a narrow programme: cent wise and dollar foolish. Abandon it henceforward and forever!

With the correction of the defects simply hinted at above, One Single Hour should suffice to traverse the Island and reach New York, unless our velocipedes, demoralized, fall to the ground; unless our horses move like the slow-footed oxen, our railroads like Broadway omnibuses, and our ferry-boats like so many old-fashioned scows.

X I

Every lot of wet land should be drained.

Staten Island is naturally healthy. On board the ferry boats, the observer can not help being impressed with the robust appearance of the passengers.

People who venture to settle upon virgin soil must pay in their persons a heavy tribute for their abrupt invasion of wild nature. The most favored spots, the driest, the highest, in any part of the country, are known not to be exempt from the dire penalty of miasmatic disease.

The greatest portion of the Island stands on elevated ground, but it is afflicted, here and there, with sore spots that breed innumerable legions of piquant mosquitoes and instil the secret venom of chills and fevers into the veins of the babe and the mother, of the foreign as well as native residents.

Therefore, nothing but a thorough, systematic drainage, will clear the soil of this nuisance. Nothing short of a general plan of operations should be attempted to eradicate the cause of the evil.

XII

If this Island were floating beside the coasts of Europe—in sight of the London quays, off Paris, within view of the Vesuvius, or by the lagoons of Venice—poets would have long ago rhymed the beauties of its picturesque retreats, painters reproduced its lovely perspectives, its marine-scapes, its celestial imagery.

Nature has performed her assigned task on a magnificent scale. She has contoured the land with a wall of liquid pearls. She has embanked hills upon hills, and combined glens and valleys. She has planted trees and grafted berries. It is incumbent upon man not to destroy what she has so wisely provided for his wants and pleasure, and to adapt the ground to the modern improvements required by our civilization. Sow, plant, and turf. Build, pave, and flag. Embellish nature instead of degrading it.

What could compare in charms, for instance, with a circular boulevard of immense width, belting the entire range of the shores of the Island? What grand views! What graceful succession of sea prospects! What agreeable visions of natural and cultivated scenery!

XIII

After having, for our part, settled the Island, converting it into a city animated by a million of thinking souls;

after organizing its various departments, and prescribing honesty and promptness as the order of the day and night ; after having drained its marshes and adorned its mansions and highways—is it futile to hope that some manly man, a benevolent capitalist, will step forward and do his share of the good work ?

Come, practical Reformer, and raise, on those thousand knolls radiant with sunshiny emeralds, a thousand cottages, in which you will have the enviable happiness to see swarms of happy Children, of contented Housekeepers, and of Laborers relieved from the extortions of rented homes. Do not give these dwellings away—a premium to idleness—but sell them, do we say, at fair rates, payable in monthly installments.

Think of those visionary wishes, men who know not what to do with your money. Fancy, as you recline upon your elegant couches, the number of families enjoying the fruit of your enlightened liberality, and blessing your name for generations and generations !

If one Peabody is not in store for us, several philanthropists might concert measures to realize this wide-awake dream. They might conduct the migration of the people toward such places as this, where land is cheap and easy of access, where parks blossom, where school houses elevate their cornices above the level of common ignorance, where churches chaunt the glories of an eternal God, where telegraphs tick-tick and railroads rattle.

XIV

Fellow-Statens-Islanders, let us achieve, by gradual steps, the Unification of Richmond County.

Promote the Populization of its farthestmost nooks and corners by offering a resting-place, fanned by sea breezes, to the over-busy and over-taxed citizens of the Metropolis, by working out the iron mines of the Island and by shaping useful pottery out of its friable soil.

Plan and execute the Beautification of its uplands and lowlands, endeavoring to make of the Island a Continuous Garden, a Mammoth Palace of Industry, a Residential Human Hive.

Let us aid nature in perfecting the Healthization of our sea-girt abode. That deserves a fair trial

XV

In the morning, from the deck of the boat, you stare at the sun silver-plating the ripples of the Bay and gilding the southern shores of Staten Island. On your return, at night, you see it again reflecting its purple-tinted hues on the opposite side. Thus, in its daily evolutions, it rolls around the Island—from New-Brighton the Coquettish to Ward's-Point the Busy—the glowing magnificence of its rise and set.

May, likewise—O Gem of the Bay!—the sun of prosperity surround your prospective City life with its beneficent morn and evening rays! May they never cease to illuminate your expected passage to higher destinies!

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